



Address to Parliament
By
His Excellency Charles A. Savarin, D.A.H.,
President of the Commonwealth of Dominica
On the occasion of the Opening of the First Meeting
Of The
Second Session of the Ninth Parliament
On Tuesday, 26th July 2016

REBUILDING BETTER POST ERIKA

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of the House of Assembly,

I am delighted to be here in response to your kind and gracious invitation to me to address the First Meeting of the Second Session of the Ninth Parliament. My wife also joins me in thanking you for inviting her to join me at this meeting.

I wish first of all to warmly congratulate Honourable Denise Charles, the newly elected Member for the Soufriere Constituency, for her victory at the by-election held for that constituency on June 7. It is my hope that she will give of her utmost in representing her constituency and that her contributions to this Parliament will be carried out with distinction and will conform not only to the Standing Order of the House but to the highest levels of parliamentary probity to be found anywhere within the Commonwealth.

Allow me also to thank Mr. Ian Pinard the immediate past Parliamentary Representative for the Soufriere Constituency for the service he has rendered to this House and for his spirited representation of the Soufriere Constituency.

The Challenges We Face

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members,

We live in difficult and challenging times. The ugly face of terrorism straddles four continents. The Religion of Peace.com states that in 2015 there were 2,865 acts of terrorism in 53 countries in which 27, 625 people were killed and 26, 148 injured. In 2016 so far that is up to June 2016 there were 1,317 terrorist attacks with 12,122 people killed and 14, 844 injured, with the attack in Nice, France standing out vividly in our minds. We are also challenged by the fact that climate change and global warming are taking their toll on the productive capacity of the land within large swathes of our planet and threatens the very survival of small islands and low lying states.

We here in Dominica have not been spared from the effects of unusual events which the experts are attributing to climate change. August 27 2015 will forever be etched in the memories of those of us who were on island as the day when the heavens opened and the rains poured down upon us evoking images of the biblical flood.

The damage done to Dominica by the waters of Tropical Storm Erika was massive and extensive.

August 27, 2015

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

With your leave, I will briefly remind the nation of what happened and of the national spirit and attitude required of citizens and others in the restoration and rebuilding of Dominica.

By the time the deluge had ceased on the morning of August 27:

- Electricity and water services were down while telephone services were erratic and irregular, some parts of the island remained without telecom services for days.
- Up to twenty people had lost their lives due to flooding and landslides and many more have remained unaccounted for up to today.

- By August 29, nine, “ special disaster zones”, comprising Petite Savanne, Pichelin, Good Hope, Bath Estate (Paradise Valley), Dubique, Campbell, Coulibistrie, San Sauveur and Petite Soufriere were declared.
- Sixty percent of the roads in the country were inaccessible due to landslides, edge failure and bridges which had been washed away.
- At the Boetica gorge, the entire road, bridge and embankment were washed away leaving that community and the neighbouring community of Delices completely cut off from the rest of the island.
- Extensive damage had been done to the housing stock of the country, with losses estimated at EC \$150 million; to compound this situation, some eighty four per cent of the houses damaged or destroyed, were not covered by insurance.
- Both Douglas-Charles and Canefield airports were rendered inoperative due to flooding and extensive mud deposits which penetrated all buildings resulting in loss of all electrical equipment and fixtures on the ground floors.
- Erosion and landslides caused crop loss and damage in the agricultural sector and made many farms inaccessible. The bay oil distillery and the bay leaf crop of Petite Savanne was obliterated, two rum factories were destroyed and a third severely damaged.
- Twenty three of seventy five schools were impacted; thirteen suffered structural damage and two were destroyed. Some three thousand, four hundred and twenty students or twenty five per cent of the student population was affected; and
- Some 48 million in loss to the hotel plant, tourism sites, etc., including the complete loss of Jungle Bay Hotel.

From local reports and from an assessment done by the World Bank, we learnt that almost the entire Gross Domestic Product of the country was wiped out in the amount of approximately EC\$1.3 billion.

Restoring Normalcy

Following the passage of Tropical Storm Erika the country was cleaned up and cleared of debris in record time. Electric power was restored in most communities in a matter of days, although as a result of damage to intakes and supply lines it took longer to restore water supply to some communities. Bailey Bridges were erected as temporary replacements for the bridges washed away on the E. O. Leblanc Highway.

In a matter of weeks a sense of normalcy had been created for most people to go about their daily business. Boetica and Delices however remained cut off for a little longer, as creating a temporary crossing for vehicular traffic across the gorge proved to be very challenging.

Outpouring Of Support

All of this was made possible by the tremendous outpouring of support from Dominica's friends in the region and throughout the rest of the world, as well as the dedication and hard work of the emergency services, the public utility companies and the people themselves who showed remarkable resilience in the face of tragedy.

I applaud them all for their generous and selfless service to Dominica.

However, as a nation that has had to deal with disasters in the past, we know that it is not over. The bulk of the work being done, and still to be done in rebuilding Dominica, will take decades.

Patience, Understanding and Patriotism

What is now required of all citizens, is to look beyond themselves and their zones of comfort and to exercise patience understanding and a sense of patriotism as undertake the arduous task of rebuilding Dominica better.

Progress will not always occur at the rate we would like. However, we should all remember that no small developing state or local community in large

developed states could reasonably be expected to be in the position to mobilise all the resources required in the aftermath of a major disaster to rebuild that which took decades to build in the first instance. The processes involved in resource mobilisation is usually long and drawn out.

We can draw inspiration and courage from the residents of New Orleans in the United States of America, where work is still in progress in rebuilding lives and homes eleven years after being struck by Hurricane Katrina. Or, we may wish to come closer home to Haiti, where six years after experiencing the most destructive earthquake in its history, it is estimated that some 80,000 people, more than the entire population of Dominica, still do not have a proper roof over their heads.

It therefore behoves all of us, as patriotic Dominicans, to recognize that it is less than a year since the passage of Tropical Storm Erika. We need therefore to put all differences aside and present a united front to the world as we go about the business of rebuilding Dominica. It is such a united front that will build greater confidence, signal that we are driven by a common national goal, and therefore facilitate a more rapid drawdown of the monies pledged and committed by donors.

If we fail to do so, we will not only sap the energy and goodwill of our own people here and abroad, but we will be sending a signal to the international community that even in the face of great national disaster we do not have the courage and the fortitude to temporarily set aside our differences in the national interest.

A National Effort

We must also demonstrate that as a people we will seek, through our own efforts, to do as much as we possibly can to rebuild our infrastructure and our economy. In that regard, the Citizenship By Investment Program (CBIP) is one such approach to reenergise the economy, particularly the tourism sector and should be presented to the world as a national effort and not as a party political initiative mired in political controversy. Let us, therefore, try to

understand what the programme is, how it operates, the benefits to the economy and to the opportunity of eradicating poverty that it presents, and if there is need for refinement, let us as a people and a Parliament agree on such improvements that could be made to improve the program as time progresses. Citizen By Investment Programs are becoming an important tool for foreign direct investment and are currently being promoted by many countries in Europe, North America and in the Caribbean. It is important to note that all political parties which have been elected to government in Dominica since independence have had an economic citizenship program in one form or the other.

Overcoming The Shock

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

Disasters are not new to us. We have faced them before, and we have no reason to believe that we will not face them again. Yet on every occasion when disaster has struck, we have emerged stronger and wiser. It should be no different with Tropical Storm Erika.

An article bearing the title “*The macroeconomic consequences of disasters*” published in the Journal of Economics in March 2009, is instructive. This article draws attention to a study that concludes that countries with a higher literacy rate, better institutions, higher per capita income, higher degrees of openness to trade, and higher levels of government spending, are better able to withstand the shock of disasters and prevent spillovers into the macro-economy.

Public policy in Dominica on a number of these indicators score favourably, and citizens should become even more aware of the importance of taking advantage of them where they are applicable.

The post Erika reconstruction period opens up to us the opportunity to be bold and innovative, to adopt new technologies as we rebuild the economy. There

are signs that we are responding to this challenge. The thrust to establish a geothermal plant to generate power for domestic consumption, will not only result in lower rates of electricity and therefore lower the cost of living and the cost of doing business in Dominica, but will create awareness and open up new opportunities for young Dominicans to pursue careers in specialised engineering disciplines such as geological engineering, geochemistry, geophysics and hydrology. It will also serve as a platform for the next phase of geothermal energy development on the island, involving the export of electricity to the French Departments of Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Madam Speaker, we will also have to search out and apply new methods of construction in rebuilding the country's infrastructure and economy. Strict adherence to revised building codes will be needed to reduce the high levels of vulnerability that became evident with the passage of Erika.

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

There is a growing body of information on what is being described as “*climate smart agriculture*”. The Food and Agriculture Organisation presents climate smart agriculture as an approach that helps to guide actions needed to transform and reorient agricultural systems to effectively support development and ensure food security in a changing climate. This approach aims to tackle three main objectives, namely; sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes, adapting and building resilience to climate change and decreasing or removing greenhouse gas emissions where possible.

I submit to this House that no effort should be spared in determining how these principles can be integrated into agricultural production as we go on rebuilding the sector. In that regard we need to reduce our dependence on rain fed agriculture as the patterns of rainfall fluctuates between drought and deluge. We need to look more and more at irrigation, greenhouse technology, aqua culture, mari culture and hydroponics.

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

A bright light is beginning to shine at the end of the tunnel of death, damage and destruction left behind by Erika. It is left to our citizens to grasp the opportunity and to be bold and selfless in taking advantage of the financial and technical support that is being made available to us by our development partners in refashioning Dominica into a less vulnerable, more resilient and prosperous place.

External Factors

Our recent history has taught us that the world will not wait on Dominica. We must continue to be nimble and to adapt to the many external forces and interests that seek to sway us one way or the other.

One of the more recent external developments which will impact us directly is the decision of the Brexit Referendum in favour of the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union. While there is no authoritative, evidence based study on the net impact of this on small open island economies as ours, the fact that there are thousands of Dominicans living and working in the United Kingdom means that developments in the United Kingdom have implications for us. For instance the observation is being made of likely fluctuations in the value of the pound against the United States dollar. Any loss in value of the pound will result in an equivalent loss in Eastern Caribbean Dollars on remittances from the United Kingdom. Yet another consequence as yet undetermined is the impact of the absence of the UK's contributions to the budget of European Union which for years has been one of our main development partners.

On the other hand the UK's ties to the Commonwealth Caribbean could become stronger and we could see the reestablishment of a presence for Caribbean agricultural products, fresh as well as processed in the UK's market, as the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union would no longer apply after the UK actually exits the European Union.

It is important to note, however, that the UK is the second largest economy in the EU second only to Germany with France a close third. It is therefore in the interest of both the UK and the EU that relations after the UK exit be on the most agreeable terms. A resurgent, strong and prosperous UK is good not only for the UK and the EU but for the international community, as well as for Dominica and the Commonwealth Caribbean.

Madam Speaker, the most significant lesson for us in this whole BREXIT exercise is the power of the ballot box. Both the government and the parliamentary opposition campaigned to remain in the EU, yet the people voted to leave 52% to 48%. One may say that the results were close, nevertheless it has to be respected by all parties. The voice of the people, we say, is the voice of God.

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

This ninth Parliament is commencing during challenging yet exciting times for Dominica and I wish for you, and this Honourable House, God's blessings and guidance as you carry out the business of the people in this Parliament with diligence, commitment and above all with a true sense of patriotism.

I thank you.

